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Science News Letter, Washington D.C., 63 (nº3), p. 38, Jan. 17, 1953
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ANCIENT FISH-Shown here is a photograph, taken from a cast at the South African Museum, of a five-foot coelacanth, a "living fossil" fish believed extinct until its capture in 1938 and again recently.
MARINE BIOLOGY
Capture "Living Fossil" Fish
South African finds a coelacanth, "missing link" specimen that allows glimpse of life in the past. Strange fish scale at Smithsonian shows Gulf of Mexico may hide unknown fishes.
THE RECENT capture in African waters of a coelacanth, a primitive lobe-finned fish of a family thought extinct for at least 50,000,000 years, has reopened a mystery buried in files at the U. S. National Museum in Washington since 1949.
Are there coelacanths or other "extinct" fishes hidden in the depths of American seas? On the evidence of a single fish scale sent to the museum from Tampa, Fla., in 1949, fish specialist Dr. Isaac Ginsburg believes that a large, primitive-type fish, unknown to science in the region, dwells in the Gulf of Mexico.
"This scale is like no other fish scale I have ever seen," Dr. Ginsburg said. It is not the scale of any of the several hundred known fish species of the Gulf of Mexico, he stated, and it is apparently of primitive structure.
It is not impossible that this is the scale of a coelacanth, Dr. Ginsburg said, but added that the real significance of the unique fish scale is that-coelacanth or not-it shows the existence of creatures beneath American waters unseen and unknown to science.
How Dr. Ginsburg obtained the mystery scale is an absorbing account in itself. A woman from Tampa, Fla., buys fish scales from fishermen to use for making ornaments. One day in 1949, she bought a

gallon of scales like none she had ever seen before, about one and a half inches in diameter, the size of tarpon scales but of a different structure entirely.

She was so intrigued by her purchase that she sent one of the scales to the National Museum for identification, where it came into Dr. Ginsburg's hands.

Dr. Ginsburg and other fish specialists at the museum were mystified by the enigmatic scale. What is was from, no one knew. He wrote the woman, asking for more scales and information about the man that brought them in, what the fish looked like and where it was caught.

This letter was never answered. The woman did not realize the possible value of her "ornamental scales" to science. And so, if any of that precious gallon of scales exist today, they probably lie forgotten along with other "souvenirs of Florida" sold to tourists the country over.

Though America may or may not be the home of coelacanths, the recent capture of a five-foot, 120-pound specimen in the Indian Ocean near Madagascar does mark the second actual specimen recovered by scientists. The first coelacanth ever brought to the attention of science was caught in 1938 near East London, South Africa, in a commercial fisheries trawl. (See SNL, April 1, 1939, p. 195.) This discovery excited the attention of scientists the world over, because the whole family of lobe-finned (crossopterygian) fish to which it belongs had supposedly been extinct for more than 50,000,000 years. The family of lobe-finned fishes are thought to have given rise to amphibians. the first true four-legged, partly terrestrial animals, of which frogs and newts are examples.

It was known from fossil remains that lobe-finned fishes had central bones in their fins, which could have given rise to true terrestrial limbs. They had functional lungs, their teeth were almost identical with those of primitive amphibians, and in other ways they resembled the first animals that roamed on land.

These were just some of the things scien. tists eagerly expected to examine when news of a real flesh and blood coelacanth turned

up after a blank 50,000,000 years. But be-
fore it could be studied, the world's most
Important fish had putrified, its priceless
internal parts had been thrown away by a
taxidermist, and only the skeleton and
mounted skin remained.
Prof. J. L. B. Smith, of Rhodes University,
South Africa, took it upon himself to find
another coelacanth. He distributed illus.
trated leaflets up and down the east coast
of Africa, printed in English, French and
Portuguese. He cajoled trawler skippers to
watch for the precious fish. He offered a
handsome reward for its capture.
Then in December his 14 years of search-
ing paid off. A native of the Comoro
islands, near Madagascar, was about to sell
a large, queer fish in the local market, when
another native excitedly told him it was
worth "plenty money." The second native
had recognized it from one of Prof. Smith's
leaflets as a coelacanth.
The fisherman received 100 (5280) for
his catch. But to scientists, the intact.
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all price for the great light it promises
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GENERAL SCIENCE
Russian Science Corrupted
Predicts destruction of science in U.S. S. R. soon to
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link" spew holly preserved coelacanth lies beyond
THE DESTRUCTION of science in the
Soviet Union caused by slavish following of
the communist party line is about to spread
to many fields that have not yet been cor-
rupted, Dr. Conway Zirkle of the Univer-
sity of Pennsylvania predicted to the Ameri-
can Association for the Advancement of
Science meeting in St. Louis.
Hints have appeared in the Soviet press
that discussions of various fields of science
are planned, which will be followed by re-
cantations of those on the losing side and
the triumph of charlatans, if previous course
of events is followed.
Despite the fact that a large part of
science, including genetics, statistics, psy-
chology and psychiatry, biology and agri-
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and astronomy, has been ruined, Russian
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Science News Letter, January 17, 1953
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possible valu. nitride. Carbon 14 is the radioactive form
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forgotten a mission lists over 220 different compounds
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Some of the problems of making radio-
may not be carbon in the Oak Ridge nuclear reactor
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en in the Indthe Advancement of Science meeting in St.
es mark the Louis by Dr. Alexander Langsdorf, Jr., of
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brought to Not ordinary carbon, but nitrogen, is the
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excellent and engineering is probably ade-
quate for all military and civilian purposes,
in Dr. Zirkle's analysis.
The reason that physics, mathematics and
engineering appear to be adequate is either
that their results can be tested by perform-
ance, such as by exploding an A-bomb, or
that the commissars cannot understand
enough to interfere.
The communist domination of science is
out of even communist control, Dr. Zirkle
pointed out. The final authority in science
is in the hands of non-scientists and the

treatment of scientists has been such that they dare to tell their masters only what they believe their masters want to hear. The political authorities in Russia have thus cut themselves off from any access to the truth in many scientific fields.

All Russian scientists, whether stupid, intimidated or disgusted, have been reduced to playing the roles of charlatans when they deal with politicians. The rulers of Russia are consequently not justified in believing anything that their scientists tell them. They cannot correct conditions, even if they are positive that quackery is rampant.

In some fields of Russian science there are no honest and capable scientists left, Dr. Zirkle has found, and these sciences can recover in Russia only by the importation of scientists from abroad to train and educate a new generation of Russians. From the evidence provided by studies by many experts, Dr. Zirkle finds:

Genetics has been replaced by an archaic quackery which repudiates evolution applied to man and upholds the inheritance of acquired characters.

Statistics has lost its basic honesty and is now used to falsify data for propaganda purposes.

Psychology and psychiatry are practically dead, with little chance of recovery.

Biology and agriculture are permeated by quackery and nothing of importance can be expected of them.

Physiology, pathology and medicine are so forced into a rigid and stupid orthodoxy that their future development is inhibited, but some sound practices survive.

Geology is subjected to political attacks, and pure research in this field is discouraged.

Astronomy includes the amusing quackery of astro-botany or the study of plant life on the planets. Certain theories as to the origin of the solar system are forbidden, but much excellent work is being done by Russian astronomers.

Much good chemical research is being done, although certain theories, such as resonance, are forbidden.

The basic philosophical background of modern physics is called idealistic and con-

demned and many of the words are separated from their meanings. Basic research in physics is probably not hurt.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Science News Letter, January 17, 1953

Public Health Service Has Inspection Privileges

➤ WHEN CONGRESS considers the request of the Food and Drug Administration to restore to the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act the factory inspection provision, it may take into account the fact that it has given the U. S. Public Health Service inspection privileges for control of manufacture of biologics such as vaccines, serums, antitoxins and the like.

The factory inspection in the Food and Drug Act was invalidated by a Supreme Court decision on Dec. 8, 1952, on the ground that the law was not clear on this point. Food and Drug officials state that they cannot be sure a product is manufactured under sanitary conditions unless they can inspect the premises where it is made and observe the methods of manufacture.

The law governing biologics control says officers, employees and agents of the Public Health Service "may during all reasonable hours" enter and inspect plants where biologic products are made. In actual practice, Public Health Service officers inspect such plants regularly once a year and oftener if it seems advisable. This inspection is one of the main jobs of several Public Health Service doctors.

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PHYSICS

Took 63 Scientists To Prove Einstein Right

THE FIRST direct experimental proof of an equation Einstein published in 1905 has been obtained by a group of 63 scientists working at the Transistor Teachers Summer School of Bell Telephone Laboratories, Murray Hill, N. J.

The equation shows that electrical conductivity takes place as a diffusion process

The scientists verified Einstein's relationship for electrons and holes. Electrons are small, negatively charged particles; holes are places where electrons should be but arc missing, thus they act like positive charges
To show the relationship, the scientists injected electrical pulses into single crystal rods of very pure germanium, then meas ured changes in the current. The way in
which the current varied was observed with an oscilloscope, a television-like instrument.
According to Einstein's theory, the relationship between the diffusion constant and mobility of charged particles depends upon the temperature, a physical constant known as the Boltzmann constant, and the magni tude of the particle's charge. The Einstein relationship has been verified previously using colloidal particles and ions, the scien tists state in the Physical Review (Dec. 15, 1952).

ASTRONOMY

Science News Letter, January 17, 1953

Most Bright Comets Are Two to Three Miles Across

BRIGHT COMETS that take hundreds and even thousands of years to complete their trips into the outer reaches of the solar system and return to the vicinity of the sun usually are two to three miles across, estimate Drs. Salah El-Din Hamid of Helwan Observatory, Egypt, and Fred L. Whipple of Harvard College Observatory.
These comets, with hearts of ice and frozen gases such as ammonia and methane, lose about one-half percent of their mass cach time they swing near the fiery sun, Drs. Hamid and Whipple told members of the American Astronomical Society meeting in Amherst, Mass.
It was Dr. Whipple who, several years ago, suggested that the solid nucleus or heart of a comet is turned by the sun's heat into the huge cloud of gas which makes up the head of a comet. The fan-like tail, by which a comet is most easily spotted, is caused by the sun's radiation that forces the gases and dust back from the comet's head.
It is the jet action of the vaporized ices on the comets that accounts for the observed deviations of the comets from the

motions expected of inactive comet nuclei, the astronomers stated. From the way in which a comet actually wanders from its proper path, Drs. Hamid and Whipple can calculate how much the comet reduces its waistline each time it visits the solar system.

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MARINE BIOLOGY

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